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Introduction: language and globalization in South and Central Asian spaces

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Abstract: In this introduction, we outline our approach to the two main themes this interdisciplinary special issue brings together – language and globalization, and South and Central Asian spaces. Arguing for the importance of exploring these topics from multiple, complementary disciplinary angles (sociolinguistic, anthropological and historical), we delineate a conceptualization of language and globalization which both acknowledges the inextricable relationship between language (use and ideology) and processes of globalization (past and present); as well as the challenges this relationship poses for linguistic research. We thereby adopt a viewpoint which underscores the importance of not *a priori* assuming that any one layer or scale – local, national, transnational, transregional – will be central to the ways language is used to perform or index globalization. To address questions of language and globalization in connection with South and Central Asian spaces, we further underscore our approach to regions as "process geographies", an outlook which is suggestive of the importance of critically reflecting on the notion of "areas" as potentially unfixed, unstable and oscillating entities.

Keywords: language, globalization, South Asia, Central Asia, space, place

1 Introduction

On the eve of the Second World Congress of the Communist International in 1920 a young Indian revolutionary arrived in Moscow on Lenin's invitation. In the course of their encounter, the man with the *nom de guerre* M. N. Roy, or Narendra Nath Bhattacharya, challenged Lenin on the question of the colonies in Africa, America and Asia. Eventually Roy was assigned to train an army in

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Tashkent with the plan to invade British India from Central Asia (Roy 1964; Hopkirk 1984). Yet a change of wind in geopolitics prevented any more serious attempts to stir a socialist revolution in India and re-emphasized the former colonial boundaries between a Russian and a British sphere of influence, with Afghanistan couched in-between and separating the two.

The revolutionary career of the flamboyant young Indian had begun on the subcontinent, and then led to East Asia and Europe, and on to Mexico where he co-founded the first communist party outside Russia. In his attempts to liberate India from the yoke of British colonial rule, Roy literally roamed the world, sought unexpected alliances, and finally returned to India where he served time in jail and became a radical humanist. In the course of his grand voyage Roy did not only participate in the fully-fledged globalization of the early twentieth century. He also transcended modern frontiers, lived in multilingual settings and traversed boundaries of both a physical and social nature (Roy 1964; Pozza 2014).

Manjapra (2010: xiii) defines Roy as an "interstitial thinker" who needs to be situated beyond the binaries of local/global and subaltern knowledge/Western episteme. Thus, Roy's intellectual biography and physical movement provide us with a stringent, yet densely compressed metaphor for a number of themes that we set out to explore in this interdisciplinary issue on language and globalization in South and Central Asian spaces: how and where can we locate space and place against the backdrop of Cold War and recent post-Cold War history? What role does language play in this regard as a means to construct, maintain and transcend boundaries? How can we understand (language) ideologies as both localizing and globalizing forces? And finally, are there ways to perceive of linguistic spaces in and beyond Asia that show us alternate paths from the one paved by the Cold War legacy?

While our focus is on language and globalization in South and Central Asian spaces, our interdisciplinary approach underscores the importance of exploring these questions from multiple angles. In addition to sociolinguistic contributions (Bolander, Britain, Ryazanova-Clarke, Zipp), the issue also contains articles which adopt anthropological (Mostowlansky) and historical perspectives (Bharadwaj, Karrar). Common to all is an exploration of globalization as both a historical and contemporary process in multilingual locales (Arrighi 1997; Blommaert 2010; Coupland 2010), and as tied to movement and mobility which take place on different scales – transnational, planetary, local, national, transregional and beyond. Before briefly positioning the articles in the special issue (Section 4), we will first address the issue's two main framing themes: language and globalization (Section 2), and South and Central Asian spaces (Section 3).

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2 Language and globalization

> [B]y opening up to globalisation, sociolinguistics is not confronting a new paradigm that opposes 'new global' and 'old local' sociolinguistic insights, and prioritises the former. Globalisation is proving to be the salient context for an increasing number of local sociolinguistic experiences.
> (Coupland 2003: 466)

Taken from the introduction to the first issue devoted to "Sociolinguistics and globalization" (published by the *Journal of Sociolinguistics* in 2003), Coupland's quote indirectly draws attention to what might be defined as the key challenge for sociolinguistic research on globalization: to conceptualize and study the ways globalization becomes relevant for language use and ideologies in particular, local physical, virtual and imagined spaces. Indeed, the upsurge in research on globalization in sociolinguistics over the course of the past decade is, to a large extent, an upsurge in research which tackles theoretical/conceptual and methodological challenges brought about by the heightened movement of people, matter and ideas, particularly across nation-state boundaries.

Globalization is not a new phenomenon. Yet its current form has attracted the most widespread attention, with scholars underscoring the possible effects of the reduced "space-time compression" (Harvey 1989), resulting from transformations in domestic and international (air) travel, trade agreements and movements of persons, increased penetration and use of digital, particularly social, media. Typically, these contemporaneous changes are contextualized against the backdrop of widespread political developments of the twentieth century, notably independence and nationalism movements, and the dissolution of the Soviet Union and end of the Cold War (cf. also Section 3 of this introduction).

These changes have sparked a range of sociolinguistic research, while also unsettling categories which have long been central to sociolinguistic metalanguage and metatheory, notably "language" and "speech community" (cf., e.g., Blommaert 2005; Makoni and Pennycook 2007; Rampton 2009; Heller et al. 2014). Indeed, as Blommaert (2010: 1) maintains, "globalization forces sociolinguistics to unthink its classic distinctions and biases and to rethink itself as a sociolinguistics of mobile resources, framed in terms of trans-contextual networks, flows and movements". This has led to the development of a whole range of terms, including "transnational" (cf., e.g., Basch et al. 1994; Appadurai 1996; Hannerz 1996; Pries 1999; Vertovec 2001, 2009); "transidiomatic" (cf. e.g., Jacquemet 2005, 2010); "transcultural" (cf., e.g., Pennycook 2007); "translanguaging" (cf., e.g., Creese

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and Blackledge 2010); and "superdiversity" (cf., e.g., Vertovec 2007; Blommaert and Rampton 2011).

At the heart of the introduction and conceptualization of such terms is an attempt to move away from both presumptions of unilateral ties between bounded groups of people and bounded languages; and between language and geographical place (Heller et al. 2014: 428). More generally, this encompasses a shift from "methodological nationalism[s]" (Wimmer and Glick Schiller 2002: 301), "methodological regionalism[s]" and "area-nism[s]", which treat nations and areas as "natural social and political form[s] [...]" (Wimmer and Glick Schiller 2002: 302; cf. also Section 3). At the same time, the contributions in this special issue also highlight the ways in which language, development, education, media, nation-building and religion are bound to and framed by particular local contexts. Various layers or scales (Blommaert 2007), in other words, may influence or be discursively constructed as influencing the ways particular practices are performed, thought and spoken/written about.

The articles in the special issue thus draw attention to the importance of neither *a priori* assuming that transnational or transregional contexts will be more consequential for language use, ideologies (Irvine and Gal 2000) and metadiscursive regimes (Bauman and Briggs 2003); nor *a priori* assuming that local and national ones will be. Furthermore, they underscore that the directionality and type of influence can and does fluctuate. Such changes can arise within a single stretch of discourse; or dominant narratives on the importance of particular actors, ideas, and places for local practices and ideologies can shift over time. In turn, these changes become linked to variations in "norms and expectations", and thus to perceptions of "what people can or cannot do", "the value and function of their sociolinguistic repertoires", and "their identities, both self-constructed (inhabited) and ascribed by others" (Blommaert et al. 2005: 203).

Intricately linked to reflections on how to theorize and conceptualize the effects of globalization on language practices and ideologies are methodological considerations, notably the question of where to research language and globalization; and through what types of data. Adopting an understanding of language as a local practice (Pennycook 2010), this special issue explores questions of language use and ideology in various local settings and in different modalities – spoken, written and mediated. It thereby underscores the multilingual environments and key role played by numerous languages (including English, Gujarati, Hindi, Kazakh, Kyrgyz, Mandarin, Russian, Shughni, Tajik and Urdu) for the performance of globalization and the shaping of South and Central Asian spaces.

In its focus on South *and* Central Asian spaces, the special issue adds a novel context to contemporary sociolinguistic debates on language and

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globalization. The contributions variously address the discursive and politico-economic construction of these South and Central Asian spaces as physical and imagined territories. By tackling issues of regional delineation and the role of language for processes of delineation between South and Central Asia, the special issue aims to engage with the often static category of "area", which has not yet been integral to sociolinguistic rethinking.

3 South and Central Asian spaces

Rather than attempting to deliver holistic depictions of processes of globalization, the contributions to this issue use particular "sites" as starting points to explore instances of translocal, transnational and transregional connectivity and disconnection. All of these "sites" are linked to notions of Central and South Asia in various ways. While some of the contributions focus on the two areas' post-Cold War borderlands in Afghanistan, Pakistan and Tajikistan (Bolander, Mostowlansky), others look at the emergence of alternative political (and potentially "areal") entities such as the Eurasian Union (Ryazanova-Clarke) and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (Karrar). In addition, two of the contributions look at "sites" that remain within patterns of globalization that the British Empire and its post-colonial successors have laid out in India and the UK (Bharadwaj, Zipp).

We would like to emphasize that we neither follow Lefebvre's (1991 [1974]: 26) hegemonic notion of space as a mere means of "domination", nor do we fully subscribe to Ingold's (2009) abandoning of space for place. We rather treat space as an abstract category that allows us to look at broader discursive interactions. These discursive interactions might result in, but are not bound to the making of place. In this sense, concrete places can refer to abstract spaces, and vice versa, but they never fully determine each other.

Our perception of South and Central Asian spaces as discursive territories that might result in the making of particular places under specific circumstances is a common theme in this special issue. Each of the contributions looks at the lives (and afterlives) of these territories in various "sites". The fact that people's movements in and between these "sites", and indeed their outlook onto the world, are often influenced by material and discursive ruins of colonialism and the Cold War period reminds us to not abandon the notion of power. Indeed, the very distinction between South and Central Asia has its roots in colonial and Cold War discourses and practices. According to Marsden (2012) such discourses and practices are also at the heart of the analytical distinction between (post-

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socialist) Central Asia and (post-colonial) South Asia (Chari and Verdery 2009) and the perception of their boundaries as stable entities. Focusing on Pakistan and Afghanistan, Marsden and Hopkins (2011: 218), for instance, demonstrate how the Afghan Frontier stretching from Iran to China has, since the 1870s, been perpetually constructed as "an 'other' space, 'out there', which is acted upon by powerful centers". In addition, Shaw (2011: 333) shows how the Bolsheviks attempted to overcome the porous southern frontier of the Tsarist Empire by restricting movement and trade across the border in order to clearly distinguish between socialist and capitalist realms.

Our focus on South and Central Asian spaces as discursive territories that can, but do not necessarily need to be linked to place making, ties in with a critical reflection on the notion of "areas" as entities in motion. By bringing together linguists, anthropologists and historians with diverse fields of enquiry, we hope to avoid what Van Schendel (2002: 647) has called "the scramble for the area" in the course of which separately trained academic communities become incapable of communicating. On the one hand, we suggest tackling this problem through a focus on concepts (language and globalization) and the avoidance of an emphasis on "stable", "areal" specificities. On the other hand, the contributions in this issue also implicitly and explicitly reveal existing material, symbolic and institutional flows (or a lack of them) between South and Central Asia. In this regard, we would like to frame this issue with the help of the illustrative image of "process geographies", forming unfamiliar spatial entities such as "lattices, archipelagos, hollow rings [and] patchworks" (Van Schendel's 2002: 664).

4 Positioning the contributions

As indicated by the points raised in Sections 2 and 3, the eight articles in the special issue are united by a focus on the ways globalization is imagined, discursively constructed, and tied to particular languages in South and Central Asian spaces. The theme of globalization is variously explored via explicit engagement with transnationalism and nationalism (Bolander, Bharadwaj, Ryazanova-Clarke), friction (Mostowlansky), diaspora and hybridity (Zipp), and space (Karrar); with the scholarship reflecting a unified concern with the ways language – both issues of use and ideology – becomes entangled with other socio-cultural practices. The fact that these practices are enacted in numerous languages – English, Gujarati, Hindi, Kazakh, Kyrgyz, Mandarin, Russian, Shughni, Tajik and Urdu – offers a reminder of the importance of addressing

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particular languages as relative not only to issues of space, place-making and scale, but also with respect to other languages. In doing so, we are also reminded of the polysemy of the languages involved, such that practices and ideas/beliefs about language are not straightforwardly mapped onto particular actors and locales (cf. Mostowlansky, this issue).

As highlighted, too, boundaries between South and Central Asia range in porosity, with the articles variously underscoring processes of maintenance, reification and transversal, across time, space and scale. Both Bharadwaj and Zipp focus on South Asian spaces, but in very different socio-cultural and temporal contexts. Bharadwaj offers a historical account of the role of English as "language of power" or "fringe language" in her critical analysis of India's "official language controversy" between 1946 and 1967. Working in particular with the twelve-volume *Constituent assembly debates: official report*, she demonstrates the parallel importance of local, regional and national scales for the ways English was framed and then reframed as key to the "Indian national imaginary" (Bharadwaj, this issue). She thereby highlights how the enduring status of English is linked with diverse discourses of colonialism, nationalism and socioeconomics; and how, in turn, these discourses react with rhetorics of "national language" and "mother tongue". In Zipp's account of "Code-switching in the media: identity negotiations in a Gujarati diaspora radio programme", we move to an engagement with South Asian spaces in the Gujarati diaspora in the UK. Drawing on an interview with Alpa Pandya, host of a popular BBC Asian Network Network Gujarati radio program, and discourse analysis of the host's code-switching practices, Zipp reflects upon the ways language use and metalinguistic commentary shed light on questions of hybridity and diaspora. In doing so, she examines how the media becomes a space in which local and transnational influences are negotiated, and how these practices of negotiation become coupled with code-switching between English and Gujarati.

Following this focus on South Asian spaces, the papers by Mostowlansky and Bolander examine post-Cold war borderlands between South and Central Asia – in Afghanistan and Tajikistan (Mostowlansky), and Tajikistan and Pakistan (Bolander). Conceptualizing the Tajik-Afghan frontier in Tajikistan's Gorno-Badakhshan as a "contact zone", Mostowlansky's ethnographically-grounded analysis of speeches, written documents and interview data serves to make manifest the complex ways different languages are made to map onto local perceptions of development and globalization. Using Tsing's (2005) concept of "friction", Mostowlansky examines these mapping processes in connection with discourses about bridge-building projects between Afghanistan and Tajikistan, which variously mark and reify perceptions of sameness and

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difference across these post-Cold war borderlands. In doing so, Mostowlansky makes manifest the polysemous and sometimes contradictory meanings that Tajik, Russian, English and Shughni carry. With a parallel emphasis on the importance of local settings for processes of globalization, Bolander analyzes the role of English for the emergence and discursive construction of Ismaili transnationalism. Drawing on data collected during ethnographic fieldwork in two communities of Ismailis living in a village in Hunza, Northern Pakistan, and the city of Khorog, Northern Tajikistan, she highlights how English becomes entangled with movement (to and away from these sites), such that the integration of these local communities into the global fold becomes coupled with issues of English language use and ideology. As a result, it is more likely for local Ismailis to meet outside of either Hunza or Khorog, for example in London, a factor which highlights the simultaneous permeability as well as fixity of the boundaries between South and Central Asian spaces.

The third bundle of articles includes Ryazanova-Clarke and Karrar's work on the materialization of two alternative political entities: the Eurasian Union (Ryazanova-Clarke) and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (Karrar). In Ryazanova-Clarke's research we see how images of the Union emerge in speeches given by the presidents of Russia and Kazakhstan and in transcripts of state parliament sessions related to the Eurasian Union. Such elite discourse shows how the Union is variously imagined, through what Ryazanova-Clarke (this issue) labels "technocratic" and "romantic" narrative strands. The construction of post-Soviet transnationality is thus not uniform or homogeneous. As Ryazanova-Clarke's critical discourse analysis demonstrates, both shared themes as well as alternate perspectives of the Eurasian Union as a political imaginary emerge in the discourse. The importance of "imaginative geography" (Karrar, this issue) is also at the heart of Karrar's analysis of the formation and development of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), established at the turn of the century to foster cooperation between China, Russia, and the Central Asian republics. As Karrar argues, language was central to the ways this cooperation was imagined, with a vocabulary of regional cooperation being used in an attempt to put forward an image of a united regional space in the face of political and economic heterogeneity. Karrar thereby also draws attention to the privileged roles of Chinese in particular and to a lesser degree Russian and English.

The issue is brought to a close by David Britain, whose commentary engages with the issue's common themes of mobility and scale. As underlined by Britain, both themes are central to the ways South and Central Asians spaces are imagined, discursively constructed, and made to relate to particular languages and socio-cultural practices. In engaging with issues of mobility and scale,

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Britain is also critical of the current tendency in sociolinguistics to overemphasize the transnational scale. As we highlight in this introduction, we too, are critical of this tendency and, as the articles in this issue show, no single scale should *a priori* be treated as more relevant than any other. For Britain (this issue), the analyses of these sites "unsettle categories". In the process they invite us to engage with new sites while simultaneously reflecting upon how this engagement might be linked to the ways "we have come to understand and theorize the old" (Britain, this issue).

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